

Breakfast in Maguindanao (in Two Parts)

by Titania Buchholdt and Yolanda Mangulamas Nawal

For a month in early 2016, I stayed with friends at the Maguindanaon home of kulintang master and UW-Seattle graduate Danongan “Danny” Kalanduyan (c. 1947-2016), in the southern Philippines. The simple, traditional Maguindanaon food I ate each day was so healthy that, after I returned to the U.S., my doctor remarked at the improvement in my health.

Breakfast each day was predictably “fish, rice, and greens”: two or three kinds of fresh fish, two or three rice dishes, and a dish of greens. The fish was broiled, or else served in a light broth with greens. Freshly steamed rice was one of the rice dishes and, for a second rice dish, rice left over from dinner the night was served stir-fried. The greens were either freshly-harvested malunggay leaves cooked in broth, or kangkong cooked in broth, or a fresh cucumber salad. The drinks served were plain filtered water, or hot green tea, or black instant coffee. To stay hydrated and healthy, I drank a cup of each of the three beverages at breakfast, one cup after the other. There was no juice or dairy. Fruit was served only with lunch.

After three weeks of very simple breakfasts, something new appeared on the breakfast table: a bundle of neatly wrapped leaf packets from the local roadside market. The leaf packets contained *tapay*, a fermented rice preparation wrapped in a large green leaf called *alem* (*Melanolepis multiglandulosa*).



photo credit: Yolanda M. Nawal

Opening up the leaf, I found that the rice wasn’t sweet or sticky. The fresh green leaves were soft and large, and added a little bit of flavor to the rice. When I sniffed the *tapay*, it smelled a little like red wine. The flavor was complex, both a little sweet and a little sour, and not quite like anything I’d tasted before.

I decided that *tapay* was an acquired taste. And yet it was tasty! I nibbled on it whenever it showed up on the breakfast table. I encouraged my hosts to keep serving it.

I have since learned that the process of making Maguindanaon *tapay* is found throughout Southeast Asia, and throughout the Philippines, and that the same fermenting process to make *tapay* is used to make rice wine in the Luzon Cordillera.

--by Titania Buchholdt, kulintang musician

As a Maguindanaon person born and raised in the southern Philippines, I have a great love for my culture's food. When Titania asked me about *tapay*, I had so much to tell. My mother used to make *tapay* at home for our family breakfast.

Tapay is made in the late afternoon, the day before it is eaten for breakfast. It ferments during the evening and overnight. *Tapay* can be eaten at any time of the day, but it is usually a breakfast food because it should be eaten in the morning, while it is fresh. If it is not fresh, it becomes more liquid, less solid.

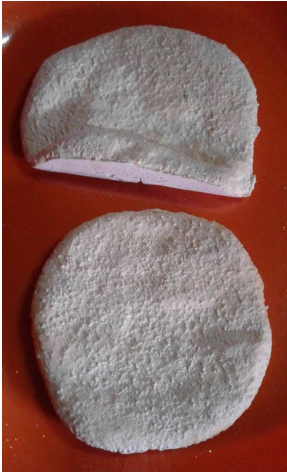


photo credit: Yolanda Nawal

To make *tapay*, a piece of a special dried rice cake called *bubol* is added to regular cooked white rice. The *bubol* causes the rice to ferment, and the *bubol* can be purchased ready-made at Maguindanaon shops located in Mindanao.

Bubol is made of powdered rice, *siling labuyo* (chili), *apug* (powdered lime), and some water. It is mixed and formed into small patties, and then naturally sundried. The *bubol* adds a natural yeast to the regular rice. It is a naturally occurring yeast that causes the fermentation process in *tapay*.

The mixture of *bubol* and plain rice is formed into flattened portions small enough to be wrapped up in female *alem* leaves. The trees have either female or male leaves, and the male leaves are small, so it is the female leaves that are used to wrap *tapay*.

-by Yolanda Mangulamas Nawal



photo credits: Yolanda Mangulamas Nawal

